



Swordmaster

an essay in one part
written by Kracken Jack

Aldana

Simply put, Aldana focuses on perfection of form and technique. It is proof that you can become a great fighter by focusing on mechanics. This much practice gives you a great deal of control over when you go, and the rest of the fight. The song is what drives you, carries you through the fight, but the song can adapt as needed. Good swordsmen not only have multiple songs, they can also learn new ones and change the old. This, combined with a focus on perfection, lead to the "trance" this school is famous for. The advantage mechanical perfection gives you turns into a pool of extra drama dice each round, essentially. Use these freely.

Excellence on defence, excellence on rhythm, and excellence on attack make for a wonderful combination. Tag your opponent a few times, put in a feint if you have the opening or your opponent likes to parry (using those nice extra dice to help it hit), and riposte if they attack you. Hold at least one action at all times, more if you want, to take advantage of riposte's power. Save up those tagging dice, and hit hard, using any unspent Focus Dice, with your last action. Some schools will parry better than you do, some will attack better, but none have the balance you do.

Compatibility:

Well learned technique carries over everywhere, and the song can be adapted to meet a variety of influences. You can use what you learned from Aldana any time you use a rapier, and the focus

on just about any fight. After all, it's just a matter of closing out the rest of the world. The rest may not translate as well to heavy weapons, though. It's possible to integrate Aldana's style of movement with heavy weapons, pole arms, or hand to hand combat, but it may be difficult.

Bernoulli

Sabre is at heart a cavalry weapon. Its slightly curved, forward weighted blade is designed to split an opponent open from above while you ride away on your horse. These origins are apparent when sabre is used on foot, too. Bernoulli exemplifies this. One hand is free so you can use reins, so you might as well punch with it if you find an opening. The fleshe was designed to charge forward and split your opponent as quickly as possible, simulating horse's charge. And with those wide sweeps of the blade, you can keep your opponents back enough to keep your breath. Corps-a-corps will usually be either a shoulder check or a nice punch, and lunge can be either with tip or a nice cut.

This means the school isn't too terribly defensive, though. About the only edge the school has is the little breathing room the apprentice technique gives (as much as +3 is breathing room.). That's OK; you don't need it. Corps-a-corps them if you wish, but whatever you do to make an opening, Then take it. There's absolutely nothing wrong with spending all your actions to charge the poor fool and run him through; save one if you're worried about parrying. Don't be afraid to use that free re-roll ei-





ther; this school works by getting that big hit. Call a couple raises, spend a couple actions, and attack. If you miss, re-roll it and spend more drama dice.

Compatibility:

A sabre is heavier than a rapier, true, but it's possible to use them in similar manners, especially if you have a nice GM. Any move you can do with a rapier can be replicated with a sabre, so all the knacks can be integrated into this school (although you'll need to find another weapon to do double parry or whirl.), but not all techniques will. A fleshe can be done with a rapier or heavy weapon, and the practice that lets you replace an attack (re-roll one per round) will also translate to a fencing weapon. But the apprentice technique relies on a sabre's edge.

Re-write:

As written, I don't like this school. The knacks combine well, but I don't like the first two techniques. Apprentice is just about worthless; I mean you only get +3 to your TN at Master, and people very rarely miss by 3 or less. Unless they're out of DD or something. So I propose the following: make the Fleshe part of the apprentice technique (it's about as powerful as the Leegstra apprentice after all).

Of course, some people might feel that Lunge 6 is too weak by itself. In that case, leave everything as is, but apply the Apprentice benefit to damage as well as TN to be hit. Rationale for this is the same as the TN bonus; the wide, sweeping swings add power to your hits.

Cappuntina

This "school" has one purpose and one purpose only: to put as many pieces of flying steel between you and your attacker as possible in the shortest amount of time. Hide a number of

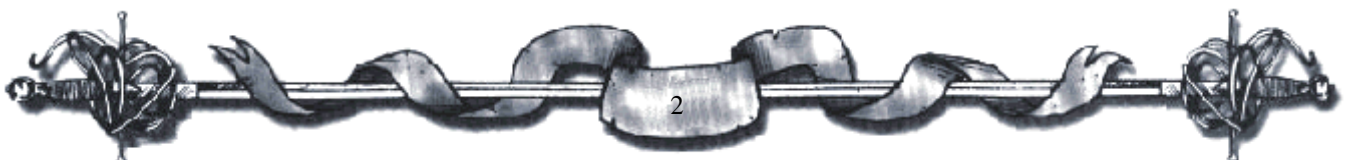
knives about your person in easily accessible places. Then, by turning the action of drawing into the beginning of the throw, speed is increased to incredible degrees. With enough practice a student of this school even gets to the point that conscious effort is not needed to aim; the eyes identify the target and the hand takes care of directing the knife's flight.

Because of the nature of throwing knives, however, and since most of the students are ladies unprepared for a drawn out fight, the school is rarely lethal. Instead, the goal is to slow your opponent down by Pinning clothing to whatever is convenient. If other people or objects are between you and your target, make the opening. Why bother throwing knives at a target when you can bounce the knife off three walls before hitting your target? Or add some distance to your throw, and surprise the heck out of your target, by throwing in a high arc which comes down directly on their head. Regardless, remember your goal; throw as many knives as you need to incapacitate your opponent as quickly as possible, and then maybe one more while they're immobilised just to teach the fool not to mess with you.

Compatibility:

The nice thing about this school is that it focuses specifically on one particular act: throwing knives. Usually this means throwing knives, but (especially with the system's easy-going weapon classification system) a parrying dagger works just as well. Of course, a throwing knife can also be used to parry.

As a result, this school can be used any time you have a knife on your person. The necessity of throwing the knife may effect how you fight afterwards, but that shouldn't be a problem. What student of Cappuntina would carry only one knife?





Dobrynya

You may think you are tough. You may even have convinced other people you are tough. But when was the last time you ran out early in the morning to hug a tree for an hour? In the rain? In the snow? In the sun? If you do not remember, then you are not as tough as you think. Pressure is a wonderful thing; apply enough and you can turn coal into diamonds. Imagine what you could do to that poor fool opposing you? Just grab them and squeeze. And squeeze, and squeeze. It's worked for snakes for millennia. This school really has very little strategy to it and doesn't need it either. If they have a weapon, take it away. Once you have, grab them. Then squeeze. If they hit you, squeeze harder. After all, you practice on trees. Flesh is much softer.

Finnegan

Not just the world's greatest boxing school, but the world's greatest DRUNKEN boxing school! Once again the Inish have surpassed us all. This school is, quite simply, designed to make a boxer who hits very hard, takes a lot of punishment, and likes a good drink. A series of little tricks and proper form help the Finnegan student hit very hard, and years of practice getting hit by these people as a learning method helps condition him to take beatings that would wipe out most people without dropping their beer. As for the drinking, there are certain ways people sway and stagger when they've had a few to drink. Most people don't expect such seemingly random movement to turn into a sudden, vicious attack, meaning you can use it to your advantage.

Sadly, most people in this civilised age feel the need to go into a fight fully armed. There exists a simple solution to this: disarm them. Wait for them to attack, duck under, bob forward, and twist the weapon from their grasp. Then knock

them to the ground and kick them a few times while they're getting up. Hit them very hard. Sink in an uppercut or a few jabs, grapple them, and quietly pound them into submission while they're trying to deal with your bear hug. If they wiggle free, don't worry. Just duck under their attacks and cut loose.

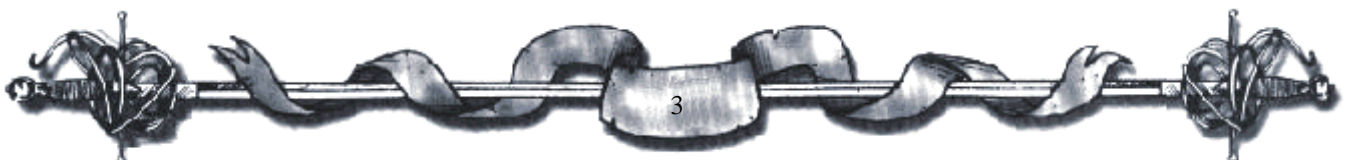
Compatibility:

The nice thing about Finnegan is that its teachings are universally useful. Granted, you may not be throwing many punches while using a sword, but the toughening training still applies no matter what you're using. And the ability to use drunkenness to your advantage can, with just a little practice, be applied to weapons as well. But any time you take a swing at someone, no matter what other teachings you use, your Finnegan training will help you.

MacDonald

Accuracy is for puny fighters who barely use swords bigger than their pinkies. A good fighter, one properly trained in the highlands, knows that the way to win a fight is to swing as hard as you can as often as you can. After all, it's not at all hard to hit a man-sized object with a 4 foot sword (at least, at the smaller end of things). So don't worry 'bout that "honourable" stuff those weak "fencers" use. The way to show your opponent honour in a fight is cut him down quickly and drink a pint or several to his memory. Hit fast, hit hard, and don't worry about "aim" and "delicacy".

This school is a simple one; light on the strategy. All the techniques are based around inflicting extra damage (5k3 by Master), or swapping dice for more damage. The knacks combine nicely to a similar end. While it seems mildly incomprehensible to hold a 5 foot sword in such a way as to hit with the pommel, you can do exactly that. The combo of Pommel Strike/Lunge is a beautiful one; especially with a 5k3 blade.





Likewise, Pommel Strike/Beat against people who like to parry or use Riposte. Granted this means you need to be able to hit with the Pommel Strike, but still.

The Journeyman technique raises some interesting questions: on a Pommel Strike/Lunge combination, is it better to call lots of raises for damage, or to sacrifice attack dice for damage dice, and make fewer raises? Well, adding 1k0 to a roll results in slightly less than +5 on average. You're basically making the trade for certainty rather than chance. Besides; assuming you roll 9k4 at this point, you can safely hit 25 with only 4k4. This gives you 4 raises, 2 dice from Lunge, and 5 from the technique for (assuming Master here) 10k9 before adding Brawn. And you can do that as often as you like.

Compatibility:

Spiritually, this has a bit of trouble with some of the other heavy weapon schools. It's much faster and more chaotic than Leegstra, and lacks the structured, methodical style of Eisenfaust. But beyond those small philosophical difficulties it could work. Mechanically (referring to both game and real life) this school works almost perfectly with Leegstra, but why you need more damage I don't know. Except for stacking the Master abilities, it's almost not worth it. And Eisenfaust is about waiting for opportunities; once those arise, there's no reason you can't hit such to make a Highlander proud!

Rogers

The widely acknowledged Pirate School, Rogers isn't so much about excellent fighting as it is about tricks. Co-ordination comes with time and practice, but that's mainly a bonus. This style, though, is mainly useful on ships (and similar surfaces like moving carriages). Unlike most schools, this uses Bind (Fencing), which

means the only weapon will be tied up. Fortunately it has Corps-a-Corps and various pirate tricks involving off-hand weapons to fill those holes.

The key to this school is to carefully pick pirate tricks that compliment your techniques and abilities; this makes up for otherwise weak techniques. For instance, "use balance instead of Parry" is, by itself, completely useless. But combined with tricks that give you extra dice on Balance rolls, it becomes more useful. Of course, you also become susceptible to tricks which give your opponents bonuses against people using balance, so beware. Decide how you want to fight, and where, and pick the right tricks. Then bind your opponent, and smash them silly before they get free.

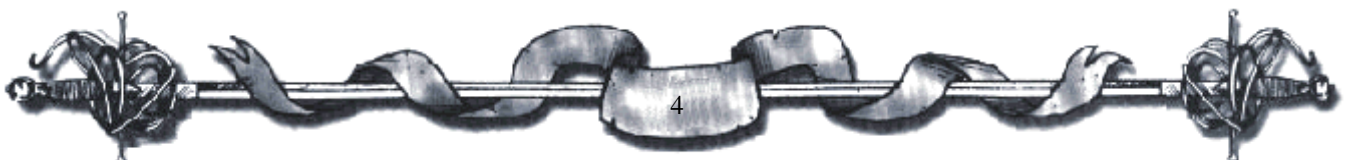
Compatibility:

These techniques are mainly designed to be used under specific circumstances (on ship, swinging down, attacking with a beer mug, etc.), but as long as you meet those conditions, you should be able to use the techniques and tricks at any time. And, of course, fear effects are pretty constant. The bigger issue is that most pirates probably won't learn a more formal school, and most "landlocked" swordsmen wouldn't stoop to learning a school that's so undignified. Most. Usually.

Soldano

A good example of Soldano can be seen in "The Mask of Zorro" when Banderas takes on a barracks full of soldiers. The Soldano master does not stand still for long, rather he is everywhere at once, cutting, lunging, dodging, and then stepping away and getting ready for the next round. This is not a school which, like Leegstra or Eisenfaust, spends its time sitting around and waiting. And this is where it gets its power.

Quite frequently, a mediocre fighter can over-





whelm a superior one through sheer wildness. Of course, it's quite likely s/he'll get a sword through the ribs for the attempt, but it will be one of those cases where both fighters fall. Beyond that, while most fighters know how to deal with one sword or even a sword and short dagger, very few are used to dealing with two full length killing swords. Soldano teaches such a rush of energy, such a flurry and onslaught that even very competent swordsmen frequently don't know how to deal with it. If a group attacks you, go into a Whirl, cutting and thrusting and dodging at all angles, and watch them all fall (our Soldano Journeyman was taking out entire brute squads in one action. By master he was calling extra raises just to make life interesting.) Of course, if someone does rush you like this, they leave little openings because they're not being careful and clean in technique. Beware these little holes.

By Master in this school you'll have a whole pile of drama dice. Whatever you normally start with and whatever you earn, you start each fight with 3 extra DD. Plus, if you're going against a villain, you'll start stealing his in large amounts. If they attack you, use Double Parry. Use Tagging a couple of times a round. With at least one action a round, attack; call raises for damage; then hit, spending a couple of these DD if you need to; then, especially if you rolled lots of damage or he hasn't taken any dramatic wounds yet, spend more DD to reduce the threshold for extra DW. At worst you'll force your opponent to spend dice on the wound check; at best you'll do enough damage to cripple the bastard in one shot.

Compatibility:

Whirl is almost impossible to do with only one sword, as is Double Parry. A kind and generous GM might, might, let you replicate the effects with a knife or improvised weapon. But it would still be difficult. Baring weapon-specific issues, I can't think of any swordsman knacks that wouldn't integrate nicely into the school. I

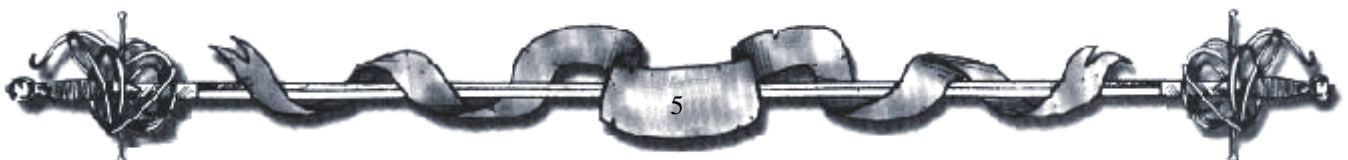
can easily picture someone of this school using one sword to bind and the other to attack, or riposting into a lunge, or disarming his opponent and *then* making the intimidation check.

As for other schools, this style would fit with any school that isn't specifically calm and calculating. Any of the one-sword styles could be done with a second sword in hand, allowing you to blend them with this. Basically, Soldano's philosophy is to overwhelm the opponent with sheer aggression, convincing them they are about to die. Very few schools would have a problem with this. The apprentice and journeyman technique would probably only apply when you are able to fight with this kind of wild abandon, but the master technique should really kick in whenever you go through a whole group of people.

Villanova

Quite possibly the sneakiest school yet known to Theah, this school relies more on outsmarting and tricking your opponent than out-fighting them. This style will frequently be used at very close range, probably even with your blade in contact with your opponent's. This allows you to clearly communicate your invitations, and to stop-thrust with a quick extension as soon as you feel movement. Use repartee actions, use feints and stop-thrust, use whatever you need. Convince your opponent the time is right to attack, then hit him. If you scare your opponent enough that he refuses to attack, hit him in such a way that he can't parry.

More so than with most schools, it's a good idea to hold actions when using this style. Double Parry or Riposte can be used off an interrupt action if needed, but Stop-Thrust can only work with held or current actions. While Stop-Thrust is a very powerful knack, it only works at full effectiveness if you inflict a dramatic wound. Therefore, it's usually wise to hold off on using





it until you've already landed an attack or two. Until then, use Double Parry. Don't worry about conserving those Drama Dice, though; spend them freely on Feints and Stop-Thrust; spending them on S-T means you can call raises, inflicting more damage, and, hopefully, stopping their attack. At Master level, lower your phase whenever you've got a held action (and aren't facing huge numbers of opponents), and lower it all the way. 5 free raises make it very likely you'll get those Dramatic Wounds, especially if you've hit them before.

A word on Fencing Rings: the "Vodacce-style rapier" (Italian in our world) allows greater power and control with the sword, because you can use more finger strength on the blade, rather than just agility. I love them. A disarm *does* twist the fingers painfully, but there are still many reasons to use this style, even beyond Vodacce (although the Montaigne would probably avoid something so unfashionable, and the Castillians actually designed a more comfortable version).

Compatibility:

Villanova is a very opportunistic school. As such, it combines very well with any other rapier school (and, with some effort, you could probably learn similar abilities with polearms or heavy weapons), because you can use the other style as normal and then, when the opportunity arises, strike to make Giovanni proud!

Going the other way, most any other school's philosophy is compatible with this one. One can be a perfectionist and sneaky/dirty at the same time; one can taunt one's opponent; one can be calm and orderly or wild and energetic. Any other attitude, except for "fair and honourable above all" works well with sneaky, dirty fencing like this.

Swordsman Knacks

Here's my take on all the knacks to date.

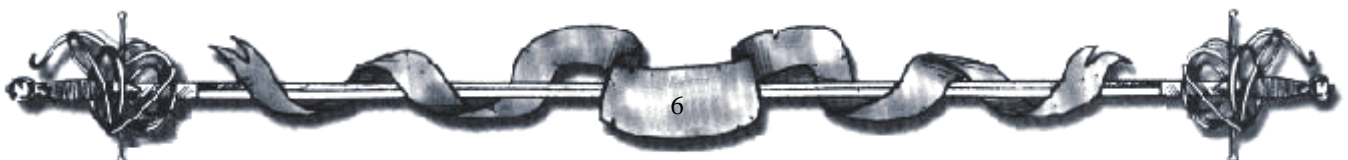
It occurred to me that part of my discussion of sword schools should include the Swordsman Knacks they use, so I'm going to go through and discuss each of them. My discussion rests primarily on what I know of sword fighting through rapier, hand to hand combat, and what I've read about projectile weapons, and I'm not dealing with cavalry knacks or those knacks that say, "This replaces the attack knack when you.". So please feel free to offer commentaries on anything I've missed, or any different interpretations.

A general house rule I'm considering is that you can approximate any swordsman knack for three raises. That's enough to make even an easy task hard.

The Knacks:

Arc: No matter how much they look like a straight line, every projectile moves in a curve. Faster ones make a closer approximation of straightness, but even the fastest bullet has a bit of a curve in its path. As you improve your skill in this knack, you learn to control this. It may seem like you're aiming above your target's head, but when the bullet eventually comes down, it comes down in the right place.

Attack: There are a very limited number of ways to attack; either you extend the point straight out through your opponent, or you cut down with a sharp edge and sever. Within that, though, there are many tricks you can use. As you gain skill in attacking, you learn how to go around, or through, parries, how to convince your opponent to guard high when you attack low, and how to control tempo and distance enough to drive your point home. At rank one you can hit your basic target. By three you can go around simple parries with ease, and by four





you can aim for specific freckles at will. At rank five you're hitting before your opponent is fully aware that you moved.

Beat: There are two types of beats; hard and light. The light beat, ironically enough, is covered under Feint; this knack deals with heavy beats. The idea behind a heavy beat is to hit their sword with enough force to leave their sword in a useless position, at least for the fraction of a second it'll take to hit them. The trick to doing a beat properly is to keep the motion in your hand so that it's fast enough and subtle enough to hit and to not leave you very far open in case you miss.

Bind: While a good bind will leave your opponent with a useless weapon for the rest of the fight, its main purpose is to make an opening into which you can attack. When using a Panzerhand or your bare hands, the goal is to get a good grip on the weapon (or its handle or their hand) and hold on tight. When using a buckler, dagger, or sword to bind, it's more a matter of pushing the blade into a position from which it can not be easily withdrawn. Usually, if you calm down and look at this situation, it's easy to escape from a bind. So don't give your opponent time to think. Putting your opponent in a bind forces him to spend actions getting free. Let them. Spend an action or two to strengthen if you wish, but concentrate instead on pounding them while they're bound.

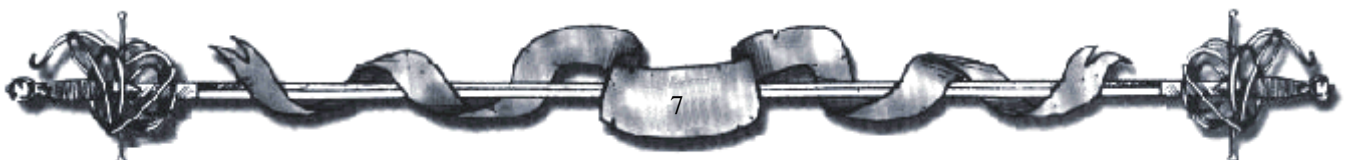
Bob-n-Weave/Sidestep: These two are essentially the same knack; the difference comes down to flavour. Bob-n-weave is more a boxing thing; when they punch, duck under it (bob) and come up to the side (weave). Or just step to the side and forward or back as needed (sidestep). Either leaves you in a more advantageous position while your opponent is still recovering from their attack, allowing you to attack sooner. If you're good enough at either of these, or you go to a fun school like Torres, this can give you a large number of actions which are suddenly cur-

rent. And, since they just spent an action, your opponent probably won't be ready to parry all of them. So side step and then unload on the fool. Probably deserves it anyway for missing.

Corps-a-corps: The most traditional form of this attack is a good old fashioned shoulder check. But there's no reason you can't do it with a good punch to the chin or a kick to other portions of the anatomy, for that matter. Regardless, you will leave your opponent in a little bit of pain and laid out nicely on the ground. Might I suggest now would be a wonderful time to attack as hard as possible? The main trick behind this knack is getting close enough to hit without being stabbed. But that shouldn't be too hard.

Disarm: There are a number of ways to disarm your opponent. You can grab the weapon and pull it out of their hand, you can apply enough force to the blade to send it flying (a good beat will do the trick, in fact), or you can apply leverage in just the right way that the sword pops out of the grip. One of the best ways of doing this is to start a big circle at the tip of your opponent's blade which becomes a much smaller circle as you reach the handle. Pick whichever way works best for your weapon, and send the blade flying. This typically works best when your opponent has just missed you, as they'll be at full extension and your sword will be in contact with theirs (usually), but it can be done at other times as well, with effort.

Double Attack: For obvious reasons, this is only possible with two weapons. Normally it's one quick slash with each weapon, but it is possible, especially with a knife, to make two attacks with the same knife. The objective here is not truly to cause massive damage, but to get in two small, quick hits. Sadly, the knack as written doesn't reflect this. As is, it's one of the most dangerous knacks in the game because it doubles your offensive Panache. Keep Double Attacking and you can beat almost any opponent. Regardless, remember the secret here is speed.





Double Parry: This can be the traditional "X" parry, or you can just push to the side with both weapons. Either way, this presents great opportunity. The reason this grants a Drama Die, and the reason it's so temporary, is that one blade (or shield or cloak) can be used to hold the parry while the other one is used to attack. An excellent and very powerful technique, spend that Drama Die right away and attack into the opening you've created.

Feint: This knack, more than any except perhaps Parry, covers a huge number of techniques which are all designed to do one thing: get your opponent to parry when you want, where you want, and how you want. Of course, since you'll be expecting this, you can attack somewhere else and hit while they're busy parrying the wrong attack. Some feints are actually attacks upon the blade, like a light beat, which say to your opponent, "Hey, I'm going to attack you now!" Some are just the beginning of an attack in one line followed by a quick shift to a different line. Either way, when done properly your opponent will be hit before even realising they didn't parry your attack.

The question has been asked, why bother using Beat or Feint when I can make a normal attack and use those raises for damage instead? The answer is simple; as good as you may be at hitting someone, there will be someone out there who is even better at parrying your attack. If you can't hit, you can't inflict damage and so, no matter how many raises you call for damage, you'll never win. Even if your feints and beats are hitting lightly, they'll build up after a while. Besides that, it makes all those points your opponent spent on Riposte suddenly become useless. As a house rule, though, consider saying that a Beat or Feint which misses the necessary number of raises but hits the base TN will hit as a normal attack.

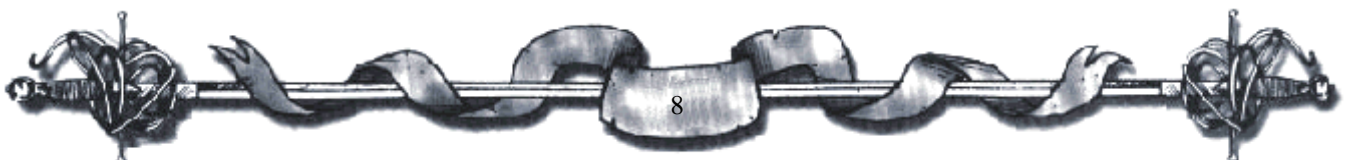
Fortitude: Not so much a skill as a learned level of toughness, fortitude is the result of

years of conditioning and physical abuse. Some of my instructors in unarmed combat tell stories of wrapping pieces of wood or metal in rope and spending hours beating on them in a variety of ways to build toughness. Some schools teach that every morning before breakfast you should slap your entire body roughly, quite roughly in fact. That's how you learn Fortitude.

Hook: A boxing term, but one that applies to any barehanded combat (or gauntlets, like Panzerhands, which work similarly). By twisting your body into the strike, your body weight and back and leg muscles add to the power of the blow. Such a little ingrained addition, but it makes a big difference.

Lunge: Every fencer lunges; it has the advantages of covering ground quickly in an attack and allowing for speedy recovery. Some, however, are faster, hit harder, or cover a lot more ground. These are the people who Lunge! The only problem with a good lunge is it leaves you spread out; if you don't hit, you're wide open for any attacks which may come your way. So pick up that front foot, throw it forward at top speed, hit, and then recover to your guard stance as fast as you can.

Parry: There is a difference between a parry, which redirects an attack, and a block, which absorbs the force. But it's not such an important difference that most people worry about it. Usually you parry a thrust and block a cut, although a hard enough cut might need to be redirected if you use a light sword. At rank one you know all the basic parries and how to move from one to the other. By rank two you have more than one parry you can use from any given position, using a combination of straight, circular, diagonal, semi-circular, seated, and counter parries. By rank three you're probably even doing them correctly. Rank four you're not parrying until the last possible second to prevent a feint, and you're probably tangling their tip in your shirt from time to time, too. At rank five you make it





look effortless, barely even moving to turn the fiercest thrust.

Pin: Few things in the world are more fun than tossing a knife (or shooting an arrow for that matter) with enough accuracy to pin your opponent's arm to the nearest wall. Well, their shirt, but it's still fun to watch them feel all embarrassed. Normally this is used to slow your opponent long enough that you can run away, but don't underestimate the usefulness of pinning 3 or 4 limbs and sending the next knife into a nicely immobilised target.

Pommel Strike: Most people don't worry about the pommel of the sword; after all, it's not sharp so how much can it hurt? So when it hits them, right in the face, too, they're left nicely surprised. Besides, getting hit in the nose is distracting. Leaves you nicely dazed for a few seconds. Traditionally this is done with the hilt (or pommel; go figure) of a sword, but there's no reason it can't be done with any blunt object. [Out of game: there's a beautiful moment in Phantom Menace that shows this. It's the end of Darth Maul's fight against Qui-Gon; Maul takes his quarterstaff-like lightsaber and smashes the handle in the middle against Qui-Gon's face. He's distracted enough by this that he can't react to the following attack. This is the best illustration I've ever seen of how to use this knack.] In games I've played, the party has occasionally decided to hold all actions until one member uses Corps-a-Corps or Pommel Strike and then unload a huge number of attacks in that one phase. But, of course, that's not sporting so we don't do that, right?

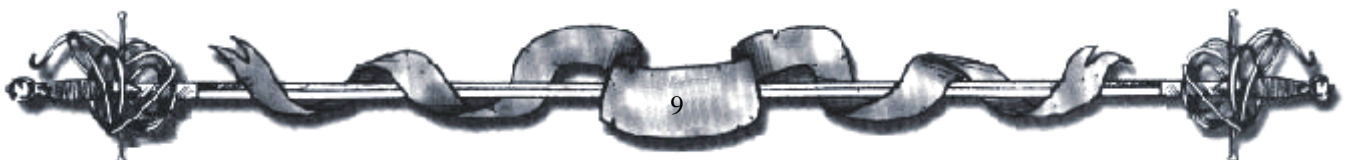
Seriously, though, Pommel Strike and Corps-a-corps both provide excellent opportunities to make attacks on your opponent with many raises. While the temptation is great to use these for damage, don't overlook the other knacks which require many raises to work effectively; Beat, Feint, Throat Strike, Eye Gouge, and Ear Clap are all wonderful fol-

low-up attacks, as you can execute these about as easily as you could normally hit them (and don't forget; in this game, hitting frequently is often better than hitting hard).

Riposte: There is a wide range of feelings about what constitutes a "true" riposte. In its simplest form, a riposte is a parry followed by a quick counter attack. What separates "riposte" from "parry/counter attack" is just a matter of timing; riposte happens more quickly. At the highest levels, it is essentially one motion, and how you execute the parry impacts how well you counterattack. While many purists define riposte such that parry and attack must be done with the same blade, it is this writer's opinion that riposte is more a functional definition; parry followed by attack. This means you can parry with your sword and attack with an off-hand weapon, or vice versa. This even means you can dodge out of the way of the thrust and attack while your opponent is extended. However, primarily how one performs a riposte depends on how they have been taught by their school. Habits are powerful.

Stop-Thrust: If your opponent makes the mistake of telegraphing their attack or using sloppy form, and many people do, you can take advantage of the situation by thrusting into their attack. When done right, your extension will block them from finishing their attack, or at least they'll be in too much pain to finish it. The trick to doing this properly is to shut out, or close, the line your opponent is attempting to use. That way they'll be sitting there looking silly with your point in their flesh and their sword feeling useless. Like riposte, the difference between stop thrust and a parry/counterattack usually comes down to a matter of timing.

Tagging: Less, almost, a move and more a frame of mind, Tagging is used to point out to your opponent exactly where you could have hit them, were you not feeling so generous at the





moment. Cutting clothing or facial hair are common, but tagging can just as easily be a thrust which stops a hair's width away from a vital point, while you stand with a grin on your face. Any school which teaches tagging should use it extensively. Build a large pool of Drama Dice, and feel free to use them when needed. Or tag with all but one action in a round, and with that last one call many raises and spend all your dice. Given a Master who rolls 9k4 on attacks and has a Panache of 5, that's a 10k7 attack. Rolling that much, you can easily afford enough raises to roll over on damage.

Throw: What it sounds like. There are different techniques for throwing weapons, based on what type of knife or axe or whatever and how you normally use it.

Trick Shooting: Sure, you can throw a knife, or shoot a bow, but can you bounce it off the pot hanging on the wall, make it go through the open window, and hit that guy in the foot? Of course you can! Trick shooting just makes it a little easier to make those impossible shots that no sane person would attempt.

Wall of Steel: [Note that it is very important to pronounce this in a very impressive *basso profundo* at all times] Your parries have become so solid that most people would rather insult a king than try to get around them. Either you parry so well and so quickly that getting an attack in is useless or you keep moving your sword so unpredictably (but controlled enough that you can still parry) that they have no idea when it's safe

to attack. It's quite possible to do this with any blade or parrying device, but if it is done with a buckler or cloak it might be more appropriate to call it "Wall of Hide" or "Wall of Cloth". As a note, the same basic thing done with footwork is the Gallegos master technique; with just a little twist, the blade passes harmlessly past and it almost looks like you didn't even move.

Whirl: Extend swords out on either side of you and twirl rapidly. Or just go into a flurry of attacks and motion. Depending on the school teaching it, this is either a dancer's graceful pirouette, only more dangerous, or an angry cat's blind rage. These aren't strong attacks, or terribly effective, but against some opponents that's all you need.

Keep these in mind when looking at how to use your school appropriately. You can get a lot of power out of a school just by combining the knacks properly. And by combining complimentary sets of knacks from two or more different schools, you almost don't even need techniques. Sometimes the most obvious uses or combinations are the best, but the ones no one was expecting can win you a fight (and make everyone at the table go "Oooo.").

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